

**CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISORDER
IN AFRICA: AN IGBO PERSPECTIVE**

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity, like every other religion, carries with it certain cultural imperatives. The terms "religion and culture" are often used in a rather confusing manner. Some use the two terms as if they were two sides of the same coin: that is, in contexts that suggest that religion is one half of a whole and culture the other half. Others use the two terms in a way that suggests an opinion that one could be interchanged with for the other; in other words, that religion and culture mean one and the same thing.

Admittedly, Religion and Culture are related in a special way which is not easily discernible without a close examination. But it is hardly the case that any of the above understandings of religion and culture is exactly correct. The two terms can neither be used interchangeably nor can they be regarded as two parts of a single thing, rather one - that is religion is part of the other - culture.

"In talking about religion it has often been acknowledged that to define religion is a rather arduous exercise hindered by a number of difficulties, not the least, including the complexities of the phenomenon called religion" (M. Okwueze, 1998:137). However, some basic conceptions are found in every religion. They are, inter alia, belief in a super-human power which may be expressed in various forms. Religion is man's attempt and desire to realize the highest good through coming into harmonious relations with one reality greater than himself, which commands his reverence and loyal service (E. Aja, 1996:36). This desire to realize the highest good is in most cases pursued by man within a collective relationship of communal attitude. It is the collective and communal attitude of members of a given society toward things that culminate into culture. Edward Tylor defined culture as "that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man

as a member of society" (E.B. Tylor, 1981:1).

From the above definitions of Religion and culture it is clear that religion is an aspect of culture. Culture is, therefore, much wider than religion as religion derives from culture and is located within culture, That IS why each religion is informed by what obtains in the culture from where it derives its life. This relationship can be likened to the relationship between a mass of water and the aquatic life (e.g. fish) that it supports. A fish out of water is undoubtedly ill-at-ease and stands the risk of losing its life when it is outside water and on its own. Just as a fish cannot exist outside of the water that gives it life, religion cannot exist outside of culture from where it derives its source and power.

Religion, therefore, has the herculean burden/task of always encumbering itself with the demands of the culture from where it arose. In fact, it has to be properly garbed in the accepted garments of the culture within which it is located. Although no two religions are the same, all have the uneasy task/duty of carrying with them the traits and character of the culture within which they grew. Christianity is no exception in this regard.

The recognition of the above nature of religion is very germane for the proper appreciation of what is usually the task of a given religion when it has moved from the cultural environment within which it was born and bred to an otherwise strange/new environment. That being the case, the survival of Christianity in the African environment required it to create, even if in an artificial manner, a replica of the environment within which it was nurtured. The challenge which Christianity had to accomplish in this situation could be likened to a fertilized egg which is taken away from the hen that laid it. If it is intended that the egg hatches (produces the normal chicken), then an environment which is a replica of the one usually provided by the 'mother hen' must be created.

When Christianity arrived Africa, it sought to create the necessary environment for its spread and growth. One major way by which it did this was by attacking the traditional culture it sought to replace with the culture in which it grew. Thus attitude gave rise to conflicts resulting in the disorientation and disruption of the traditional Igbo socio-economic order. In the instant example, the egg is the religion while the hen and/or the environments provided by the 'mother hen' is the culture.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to show that the damage which Christianity

brought upon the traditional Igbo society is so much that this has culminated in the disordering of the traditional Igbo socio-economic order with the attendant terrible and unwholesome implications for the Igbo.

Perhaps the most appropriate way of doing this is by re-examining the social-economic and socio-political order in traditional Igbo society, the new order which Christianity introduced with a view to analysing what negative changes have been impacted on it by the advent and activities of Christianity.

THE IGBO SOCIO-POLITICAL ORDER

Talking about the socio-economic order in traditional Igbo society can hardly be done without looking at the socio-political structure which partly informs the way and manner wealth and money is acquired and used. As a result, we shall take the liberty provided by the above reality to examine the socio-economic and political life of traditional Igbo society. This is the only way of knowing how much change Igbo life has undergone as a result of the impact of Christianity and the culture to which it belongs.

The details of Igbo traditional government varied from place to place, but its characteristic nature is always the same.

The basic unit of Igbo society was the village group. The village group was a small society organised around family groups who lived in a face-to-face and sometimes dispersed individual compounds (Isichei, 1977:21).

Historians have sometimes written as if large political units were 'more advanced' than small political units, and as if a change from small to large units were a form of progress. This may be so in modern world, when a large state, for instance, commands more resources for development, and more so, have more independence in international affairs. In traditional Igboland, enlargement of scale offered no obvious advantages, and the small scale of her political institution made true democracy possible (Isichei, 1977:21).

Democracy, as it exists in the modern world, is full of limitations. Government takes decisions that many citizens disapprove of, even among those that elected them. Minorities, even large ones, have little hope of having their political ideas put into practice. The average citizen has effectively no power to alter the network of regulations that govern his life. But one thing

that struck the first Western visitors, including missionaries to Igboland, was the extent to which democracy was truly practised. An earlier visitor to a Niger Igbo town said that he felt he was in a free land, among a free people (H. Johnson, 1882:547). Another visitor, a Frenchman, said that true liberty existed in Igboland, though its name was not inscribed in any monument.

Recently, a public lecture titled 'Civil Society, Democracy and Development' was delivered by Prof. Okonjo to mark the 1998 faculty of the Social Sciences Week, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He argued that the first task was to identify what type of civil society that is being talked about. He noted that what obtains and constitutes democracy in the Western world was largely limited while in African traditional societies you had the greatest resemblance of true democracy where decisions were always reached by a consensus rather than by the simple majority method of the Western democracy. Western democracy he points out, undermines the feelings and the yearnings of the minority.

Igbo political institutions were designed to combine popular participation with weighing for experience and ability. One finds, in different parts of Igboland, different political institutions in varying combinations. Yet, at a slightly more removed level, pre-Christian and pre-colonial Igbo society can be seen to have enjoyed some striking uniformity. Throughout Igboland, political fragmentation obtained, with the village group being the largest unit of definite political integration. And within the village, group authority was dispersed, with lineage and non-lineage in institutions, individuals and groups, hereditary and non-hereditary officeholders, men and women, the gods and the ancestors playing recognized roles in government.

Some communities evolved highly developed title systems. Usually, there was a hierarchy of ascending titles, to be taken in order with ascending scales of payments. But it was not a simple matter of the purchase of political power with wealth. A title was a guarantee of character as well as of success. The entrant went through protracted and arduous rituals, and his later life was surrounded by religious restrictions, which became more onerous as he rose in the title structure. They were scrupulously kept.

Another political institution which was widespread, but not universal, was the age grade. Each age grade had defined obligations in community service. Each was jealous of its good name, so controlled and disciplined its unsatisfactory members.

The above over-view of *the* Igbo socio-political system IS significant in understanding its relationship with the socio-economic system. It is noteworthy that the near egalitarian nature of traditional Igbo government gave no one an undue advantage over the others. More important is that in traditional Igbo setting, participation in governance had no direct relationship Wlt1 the control of the community's wealth. Apart from land which was hardly scarce in traditional Igbo society (almost everyone had as much space as he cared for to live and farm on) the family, lineage or e fen community heads did not control the economy or wealth base of the community or that of the individual. There was in fact, no common national cake as such at the disposal of the political heads to share or distribute either fairly or unfairly as is the case in modern societies.

The point, therefore, is that Igbo traditional society was organised in such a way that no single person or group had the privilege of controlling the wealth and economic well-being of the other. This situation paved the way for the smooth running of Igbo societies where the acrimonious quarrels arising from the struggle for the common wealth by groups and individuals were largely absent.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC LIFE

Igboland was a society which lacked extreme wealth and poverty. The Igbo are habituated to labour from their earliest days. Everyone contributes something to the common stock and as all were unacquainted with idleness, there were no beggars. Practically no one except the very young and very old were exempt from manual work, and the skillful and productive farmer or craftsman was highly esteemed. The society did not encourage the accumulation of wealth. The typical Igbo preferred to exchange his wealth for his community's esteem. He would take a title, the symbol of his esteem (Isichei, 1977:34).

This is not to suggest that the Igbo society was an economically perfectly egalitarian one. No society is. Some were more prosperous, more gifted and more energetic than others, while others were impoverished through ill-health, an unlucky harvest or war. But the more fortunate helped their poorer relations and were repaid by their gratitude or by their help, if they fell on evil days. So that in all cases of ill-luck or misfortune, friends, relations and the community at large were on hand to give help that would cushion the effects of such misfortunes.

These socio-economic ties (order) were so effective that they informed the solidarity

given or received by groups and individual members of the society. In fact, they informed the great difficulties which one encountered if one ever attempted to treat his community's norms with contempt. The response of an entire neighbourhood to misfortunes of members of her community is strikingly exemplified in a situation where one's misfortune is, for instance, that his house has been gutted down by fire. In such a situation, on an agreed date, the entire neighbourhood would render their unanimous assistance in rebuilding the house, including the provision of materials to be used. For all these, the community receive and expect nothing in return expect a moderate entertainment and a similar reaction from the present victim when in future, any one of his benefactors fell on an 'evil day'.

Although failure in life endeavours is not commended or encouraged by traditional Igbo society, it was not the case of taunting those whose efforts In their life endeavours have not been favourably rewarded. The attitude of Igbo society to the less successful is seen in the extended family system where consanguinial relationships provided a linkage that made everyone the father, mother, brother and sister of everyone else no matter how remote the consanguinial ties may be. Usually after the nuclear family, there is the extended family or the kindred which is referred to as the 'Umunna'. In the literal sense 'Umunna' signifies all the children begotten by one father. This actually is the group of families with the same affiliation to the same ancestral father. The kindred has more authority than the nuclear family. For example, the kindred can persuade an individual or a nuclear family to rescind its decision or even renounce its claim to something for the interest of peace and for the common good. Fair play, trust and confidence are the guiding principles in resolving such vexed issues. The resignation to the voice, or to such decisions of the kindred enhances good neighbourliness, peace and mutual understanding. In this situation, one man's problem becomes his neighbour's problem too (S.O.Akwuba, 1998: 13-14). That explains why there were no 'beggars' in Igbo traditional setting as earlier mentioned. Those who in modern society would have turned public beggars were otherwise adequately taken care of by family members (nuclear and extended) and close neighbours whose benignity was invariably put at the disposal of whoever was in need of it.

It was, therefore, almost strange even to hear that someone had no father and 'mother (or any. one of them). While it remains a fact that biologically one could be an orphan, it was socially impossible to find an orphan in traditional Igbo society. The point has been earlier made that everyone who had immediate and sometimes remote consanguinial tie was interested in

being the socio-economic father and mother of a biological orphan. This was so because of the existing socio-economic order in Igbo society. Those upon whom this role fell, as a result of consanguinial ties, saw it both as their responsibility and privilege to be everything known as father or mother to the otherwise biological orphan. It was the responsibility of family members, nuclear or extended, to provide for the less privileged (as the orphan) or more generally for their less successful relations and neighbours. It was not uncommon to see more successful relations take wives and build houses for their less successful ones. This reduces the economic tension and pressure that is the lot of modern society.

Those relations, who, being in a position to help their less fortunate relations, but fail or neglect to do so, were taunted and regarded as failures in Igbo society. For instance, in typical Igbo villages, you will not find a mad man walking the streets for the simple reason that his relations will not allow that to happen. No family can survive the embarrassment and the social stigma that arises from such a situation. Adequate care must therefore be provided for him at home by his relations.

The impact of Christianity on traditional Igbo socio-economic order

The history and account of the advent and activities of Christianity in Igboland have been so adequately given by several writers from such varied perspectives* that there is hardly any need to start this part of the paper by recounting how Christianity arrived in the Igbo nation.

Suffice it to say, however, that the history of Christian missionary enterprise in Igboland dates back to about 1857 when the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) arrived the Niger town of Onitsha. The C.M.S. was followed much later by the Roman Catholic Mission (R.C.M.) in 1885 when they arrived Onitsha under the leadership of French-born Father Joseph Lutz (E. Ilogu, 1974:57).

History is replete with facts concerning the feeling of the various missionary bodies when they arrived Africa and Igboland in particular. The testimony of history is to the effect that they (the missionaries), like Mungo Park, have 'discovered' a people who were not part of the 'world', who were left out there in the cold without any knowledge about how to live their own lives. The task therefore was to 'help' the 'discovered' people to learn the proper way of conducting their affairs - namely Euro-Christian way of living and doing things.

This attitude is not surprising if one realizes that most of the initial personnel of the major missionary bodies who came to Africa (Igboland) were drawn from Europe and America, where, in any case, the missionary bodies had their base. The missionary personnel consisted of those who were born and bred in Europe/America and for whom everything African was strange and unacceptable. The mission to preach the Gospel could not therefore be accomplished without the mission to 'educate' Africans about the Western culture in which Christianity grew. They taught Africans how to become Europeans. In fact, the situation was like a replay of the circumstances that gave rise to the first Christian Council in Jerusalem as recorded in chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles. The agenda of this first Christian council was how to resolve the issue of the insistence of some Jewish Christians that the Gentiles must first perform the important Jewish ritual of circumcision before being admitted into the Christian fold. The implication of this was that the would-be Christians of other nationalities would first of all become Jewish nationals by culture before they could become Christians.

On the arrival of Christianity in Igboland, a similar requirement was placed before the would-be Igbo Christians. They were to first become Europeans or Americans, as the case might be, by culture before they could become true Christians. The Christian's zeal in an Igbo convert was measured by the impetuosity with which he condemned his culture and destroyed everything around him which symbolized it. The missionaries, on their part, never made any pretence about their lack of understanding, lack of patience/willingness to understand, and complete disregard for whatever was African. John Munonye shows this general attitude of the missionaries in his record of the instruction given by Father Superior to a hesitant missionary trainee, Father Smith:

We want on our side the vast number who in the Africa of the future will sustain their church with their numerical strength. Call it vote for the masses if you like. In pursuit of that objective / am afraid we have got to be impatient with the culture of the people. There just isn't time to sort out first and label their customs as acceptable or unacceptable. (J. Munonye, 1966: 146).

With this kind of unguarded approach, the missionaries descended heavily on every aspect of Igbo culture, destroying so many things, and not the least, the socio-economic order/aspect of the Igbo culture. With the socio-economic ties which held the Igbo people

together broken down and over-run by Christianity and its culture, the Igbo society was opened up for all kinds of influences and changes with Christianity taking the lead on other agents.

It is, perhaps, important at this stage to point out that in appraising the impact of Christianity in the manner we have set out to do in this paper, it is hardly possible to do so without appreciating the close connection between Christianity, the British traders and government. In that they all represent the Western civilization and culture. Stressing this relationship between Christianity and Western culture, Mbiti insists that "there is no Roman Catholic priest and a European - both are the same" (J. Mbiti, 1969:231). In the same vein, Ayandele reports the close link between European Trading Companies such as West African Company and the Christian Missionary Society (E.A. Ayandele, 1966:82). This kind of relationship captured by Mbiti and Ayandele is vindicated by the fact that in 1841, British traders, Christian missionaries and adventurers together undertook a journey to the basins of rivers Niger and Benue to survey the area for trading' and evangelism. In fact Ayandele pictures the Christian missions as pathfinders both for the colonial government and British traders (Ayandele, 1966: 82). Christianity would till the ground for the traders and government officials trailed-behind.*

Christianity was able to do this by adopting a number of strategies, which included the establishment of schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc. The sale of Western culture to the Igbo started from the schools and catechism centres. There, the pupils were taught from a curriculum that was completely choked and deeply enmeshed in Western ideas, values and thinking. It is at this point that the disorientation started for the young African (Igbo), who, having imbibed this teaching, abandoned his culture and whatever it stood for. With Christianity as the chief/major agent of change and its collaboration with its brothers, namely, trade and government, the old ways began to crack and the existing socio-economic order was subsequently weakened. Of course, the Christian missions had mortgaged their independence from the goals pursued by the colonial government when they received grants-in-aid from the government to enable them run their schools. They had to propagate the goals of the colonial government along with their own evangelical goals. Both goals in any case were not too far removed from each other.

As has been mentioned earlier, the socio-economic arrangement of the extended family system and the communal system of life in Igbo traditional society were structured in such a way that they provided a means by which provisions were made to take care of the less fortunate or

the less prosperous in the family, community or society. In typical Igbo society, the more fortunate, the more prosperous, the more gifted and the more energetic helped the less fortunate those who were impoverished by ill-health, unlucky harvest, natural disasters or a war. In the case of each type of misfortune, friends, relations and the community at large were on hand to give help that would soothe the frayed nerves of the victims. It is this system that kept the Igbo socio-economic life at a balance, shutting off the unbridled tendencies to acquire wealth by all means, fair or foul.

As the Igbo society was opened up by Christianity and her allies, this neat arrangement began to collapse. With the stress on individual achievement and survival which became the vogue, the more fortunate and prosperous gradually began to acquire the tendency to taunt and oppress the less prosperous and the impoverished with their economic success in a manner that introduced a negative motivation which began to drive the impoverished to use all means, fair and foul, to achieve economic prosperity. This created tensions that were hitherto unknown to any Igbo society. When the Igbo societies imbibed this rather individualistic system of existence, the extended family which was the bedrock upon which the Igbo socio-economic order rested gave way. People became concerned with their personal survival only, and at most, that of their nuclear family, thereby destroying the earlier arrangement where the 'biological orphan', the aged and other 'destitutes' were taken care of by family members and extended relations. Before the coming of Christianity and its Western oriented culture, the word 'orphan' existed only as a biological fact. In traditional Igbo socio-economic and cultural context, the word 'orphan' does not exist. This is because the biologically orphaned received the same care, socially and economically, as the 'fathered' and 'mothered' in the Igbo context. But with the changes brought about by the impact of Christianity and its Western culture, the 'orphaned' was abandoned by family members and relations whose duty it was to take care of them as they (family members) became engrossed in the struggle for individual survival rather than the survival of the family group as was, hitherto, the case before the introduction of the Christian culture.

The abandonment of the orphaned, the aged and other destitutes by their families and relations was abnormal in any Igbo society. However, it was rather the norm in the Christian-Western culture that family members and relations should not be burdened with problems other than their individual ones. Having destroyed the arrangement which took care of the orphaned, the aged and other 'destitutes' of varying descriptions, the Christian missions went about building

orphanages and other types of destitute 'homes', pretending to offer to take care of those that were deserted by the direct impact of their missions' own activities.

While in the Western setting and culture where Christianity grew, orphanages and destitute 'homes' sufficed as adequate care and answer to the problem of those who belonged to that group, in African societies and the Igbo in particular, providing a person a place where he has no unrestrained contact with the entire community was anything but satisfactory. In fact, in the Igbo context, anybody who suffers such social restrictions hardly feels any better than a socially ostracised, 'never-do-well' or a jailed criminal in modern society. In Igbo societies, to live is to be in communion and communication with one's native community. That explains why the orphanages and destitute homes with which Christianity replaced the socio-economic order It destroyed will never succeed in providing satisfactory care to the African (Igbo) inmates as they do in Western societies. The situation arising from this is like a two-edged sword. Those who are forced to accept these 'Western homes' remain socially, economically, and therefore culturally disoriented while those who are probable candidates for the 'home' but reject them become problems to Igbo societies as they prey on the society in various ways as if to vent their anger for being abandoned by the new society. Whichever way, tensions build up on the system.

With the aid of Christianity also came a new system of government other than the Igbo traditional system of government. We had earlier noted that the Igbo traditional system of government was essentially egalitarian in nature, giving no one in the system of government any undue economic advantage over the others. Participation in governance had hardly any direct relationship with the control of the community's wealth. Although family heads looked after those parcels of land that were commonly owned by all the members of the family, individual members of the family had enough personal lands for purposes of agriculture and residence. The questions of what may be called the national cake (collective wealth of the family or community) controlled by a few and upon which everyone depended for survival did not arise at all. Thus, the tension created by such situations in modern governance where the economic well-being and survival of millions of people depend on how prudent or prodigal a few men who control the communal wealth decided to be with their wealth was largely absent in Igbo traditional societies.

The type of government which created tension by its control of the common wealth was

what replaced the traditional system when Christianity broke down the people's time-honoured ways of conducting their own affairs. The connection between Christianity and the new form of government is exemplified by the fact that even in running the Church's own government, there were people who were placed in positions either as catechists, teachers, principals, administrators, curators, parish priests, archdeacons, etc. who had a power of life and death over those that were placed under them. This kind of situation is prone to tension. The Christian missions did all that was necessary to support the colonial government's arrangement not just because of having lost the gut to challenge them because of their financial support and patronage which always came in terms of grants and aid, but even more importantly because they were 'inseparable' partners in progress. It was the lot of both the Christian missions and the colonial government to discharge what they called "the white-man's burden" of 'civilizing' Africa; a burden which they unilaterally placed on themselves. In their understanding, to civilize the African (Igbo) was to do everything to de-Africanize him, and this attitude has left African (Igbo) social economic order disordered.

CONCLUSION

Igbo societies of the pre-Christian era were so organised as to minimize tensions brought about by social inequalities. In the Igbo traditional government structure, we saw the closest resemblance of true democracy that is not frequently found even in modern societies. Popular participation at various levels was the hallmark of Igbo governance to the extent that decisions were always reached by a consensus rather than by the simple majority system of modern democracy where decisions are sometimes reached without the opportunity of the populace to make their input. Again, we saw that the pre-Christian/pre-colonial Igbo government was arranged in such a way that those who were directly involved in government had no direct control of the wealth of the community. Admittedly, family heads were the custodians of commonly owned family lands, but individuals had their own lands where however they had enough space to live and farm on as land was hardly a scarce commodity in traditional Igbo societies. These arrangements ensured the minimization of struggle and tension in traditional Igbo societies.

The socio-economic system was equally strikingly humanistic, The extended family

system was the superstructure upon which the socio-economic order rested. While success was lauded, it was never done at the expense of the less fortunate and less successful. Like in every society, some were more gifted, more energetic, luckier in their endeavours and therefore more successful while others were impoverished and less successful for varying reasons ranging from physical disability to natural disasters or outright ill-luck. What is very striking, however, is that in each case, relations (nuclear and extended), friends and the community at large were on hand to provide help that would cushion the economic deprivations that ordinarily would have followed such misfortunes or lack of success in life endeavours. It is, however, to be noted that this arrangement will hardly avail the indolent. It is only meant for those whose lack of success is not their own making.

When Christianity arrived Igboland, its mission was to change the culture of the people. The reason as we have said earlier is that because of the relationship between religion and culture, the former being part of the latter and deriving its life force from it, religion cannot exist in a (cultural) vacuum. The Christian missions therefore set out to create a Western cultural soil (context) in Africa on which the Christian religion could be planted. This involved a frontal attack on African (Igbo) culture' with a view to replacing it with Western culture. For instance, the extended family system which cared for the biological orphan, the aged, etc., was destroyed and replaced with the building of orphanages and' destitute homes which turned out to be very unsalutary replacements.

It is, therefore, clear from the foregoing, that the Christian missions, rather than providing economic emancipation as has been assumed in many cases, were responsible for the frightening .height of cultural disorientation and the disturbing level of socio-economic disorder which is now the bane of Igbo societies. One looks back with a tantalizing nostalgia at that Igbo society with the least of tension where the unbridled struggle for wealth and survival by all means, fair and foul, which is the hallmark of modern Igbo society was largely unknown. We cannot but acknowledge this unfortunate situation brought about by the activities of the Christian missions as Chinua Achebe had done 40 years ago. Referring to the Christian missions and the Western culture in Igboland, he sadly wrote, "The white man came and put a

knife in the thing that held us together and we have fallen apart" (C.Achebe, 1958:87).

Thus, with Christianity, Igbo societies have fallen apart in a way which can hardly be better captured by any other word than disorder.

This disorder is largely informed as we have said earlier by the opportunity given to those in modern government (unlike their counterparts in traditional Igbo government) to control the wealth of the entire society giving rise to unbridled corruption and consequently, as in a number of cases, to the struggle by those not in government to get their 'share' of the 'national cake' by ousting those in government by means fair and foul. It is not surprising, therefore, that in many parts of Africa this struggle which is an off-shoot of the type of governance brought in by the Christian-Western culture has led to full scale ethnic and racial conflicts and wars fought by one ethnic/racial group to wrestle the control of the 'national cake' from another group. The pillage is everywhere in Rwanda, Malawi, Zaire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Senegal, Sudan, etc.

Although it could be argued that the Church, in a number of ways* is now making frantic efforts to undo the damage it had done, the rebuilding has not been able to keep pace with the speed of the destruction unleashed in the past with frightening zeal.

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